

February 9, 2007 - - LC 1004 or SB 288

The following information is provided so that committee members and sitting legislators may be fully informed about existing adolescent programs in the Thompson Falls and Trout Creek, Montana area. As a Montana resident and Parent of an adolescent who attended the Galena Ridge and 20 Peaks programs I believe that changes in oversight need to be made.

1. Board of Directors for the adolescent programs needs to be expanded to include personnel from Montana State administrative programs, to ensure compliance with state safety standards, hiring and employee practices, and the care of program participants.

Specifics - - Require Certification and advanced education for operators of these facilities. Written specifics by the board of directors should include a Mission statement, Philosophy of the program and Description of the services provided.

Program/School needs to have proof of general liability, professional liability, fire, vehicle insurance. Follow accepted accounting practices to disclose all costs and fees for service.

2. Employee Practices - - Employees need to complete an Application for employment and complete a background check as well as provide references. The DMV needs to be contacted to determine that the employee has a valid drivers license.

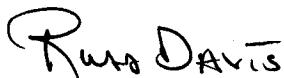
Employee written job descriptions and minimum level of education, training and work experience and lines of authority need to be in place.

3. Resident Standards - - Safety of adolescents is primary. Balance meals requiring up to 3,000 calories a day must be provided. Non-abusive Physical training should be encouraged and planned. Special treatment such as seclusion, restraint, passive holding need to be addressed. A student handbook of rights and responsibilities should be written and given to each student. Housing for students needs to be of sufficient size, space, configuration and condition to keep risk to a minimum.

4. The programs that I am familiar with (Galena Ridge and 20 Peaks) provided a safe place for my son. But they seemed to forget the most important thing for those of us who live in Montana - - to main stream these young boys back to a stable family living situation as quickly as possible. My son endured sleeping in the snow for weeks, being feed carbohydrates instead of balanced meals. Taken to the highway and told to hitch hike to the Thompson Falls Clinic, after allergic reactions to bee stings (after being saved by his epi pen, and having stopped breathing). Letters from my son to me were reviewed and given back to him to rewrite before being sent (just like being a POW). I had to repeat myself any number of times about being kept informed about my sons progress. As a parent I was told not to come to High School track and cross country meets, because that would be disruptive. My response was very straight forward as a Montana parent, " what we do in Montana is support our kids in sports and school functions and I will be at events ".

In conclusion : We are here to prepare our kids be mainstreamed into society and to be family oriented. Some of us may need some help along the way, from qualified individuals and well run programs.

Thanks for you time,



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Senator Weinberg,

I write because I will be unable to attend your committee hearing on SB288 sponsored by Senator Schmidt. Generally, I think Senator Schmidt's bill is an excellent piece of legislation and will help create a much needed level of regulation for therapeutic programs in Montana.

It is important to understand that the growth of private residential treatment programs in Montana and the nation that has taken place in the past 15 years is due to a genuine need for long term residential care. The need has not been met by traditional medical models of care due to insurance company's refusal to pay for long term treatment and due to psychiatry relying on the use of medication to solve the problems of many struggling adolescents. Outpatient and wrap around models of care fail to provide the containment, structure, and nurturing needed to resolve adolescent issues of identity and character development.

Private therapeutic schools and programs provide an important resource for desperate parents and at the same time contribute hundreds of well paid professional jobs to the economic base of Montana. Many programs in Montana have a reputation as being among the best in the country. We deserve the support of having a licensure process that adopts standards of care designed to safeguard the interests of children and families and at the same time protects responsible programs from the damage caused by uninformed critics who claim that Montana programs are unregulated and therefore abusive. Such concern and criticism might be aimed at the few programs that are uninformed about nationally recognized standards of ethics and practice, but the criticism indiscriminately falls upon all of us in Montana even though we operate with the highest professional standards.

While we desire regulation it must be responsive to the needs and diversity of programming that exists in Montana. The new profession of private residential care is not intended to be the old medical model, and regulation must allow for the flexibility of home and open campus settings that are by design not institutional.

We at Montana Academy in concert with virtually all Montana Programs that are members of the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs support responsible licensure. We ask that any small differences that exist between Senator Schmidt's bill and one that might be proposed by Senator Elliot be resolved so that we can all support a single bill leading to licensure of programs this year.

Sincerely,

John L. Santa, Ph.D.
CEO Montana Academy
Past President of NATSAP